

# North moves nearer to open conflict

By  
Pat Carney

At the Berger hearings in Fort Good Hope last week, the North moved one step further down the road to open conflict.

Band Chief Frank T'Selei said he was prepared to lay down his life to stop the proposed gas pipeline. He called Bob Blair, president of Foot-hills Pipeline Co., a 20th century General Custer and accused him of being like the U.S. military, "planning the slaughter of innocent Vietnamese."

It is ironic that T'Selei chose to savage Blair, who is among the few pipeline executives I have worked with who is sensitive to northerners and northern issues.

It is also ironic that the offer to die rather than develop was made by Frank, who, when I first met him, had a reputation as being a hard worker in the oil patch.

My own view of the proposed pipeline is pragmatic. The decision to build, or not to build, a pipeline will probably be made in the South. If southern Canadians require northern gas, a pipeline will likely be built, somewhere, sometime.

However, I do not believe that the choice should be between death or development. And that is the choice which is emerging in the North.

I think we can blame all parties for this ugly situation.

The pipeline companies, for their preoccupation with permafrost, rather than people, in pipeline planning;

The native groups, for choosing the politics of confrontation — where you either win or lose — instead of the politics of consensus, where you can compromise;

Ottawa, for funding our own North Vietnam, or Cambodia in the north, with the Canadian taxpayer's money;

Finally, the Canadian public and especially the media for allowing their misty-eyed romantic illusions about the North to blind Canadians to northern realities.

It is necessary to understand that the issues involve politics, not pipelines. The central conflict will revolve around the political development of Canada's North.

Native northerners argue that their choice is between extinction or survival. But for Canadians as a whole, the choice will be whether the Mackenzie Valley evolves as a part of Canada, as we know it, or whether it is to emerge as the Dene (native word for 'the people') nation, which to all intents and purposes would function as a separate political unit.

Southern Canadians — including Ottawa bureaucrats — don't seem to have the foggiest notion that these are the choices facing them. And until they do, the native groups and their Dene nation and Ottawa and its terms and conditions for pipeline development are on a collision course.

In this context, the pipeline — any pipeline — is merely the catalyst.

To understand what is happening in the North, and what is likely to happen, it helps to understand the current philosophy of many Canadian academics which is also popular in developing regions around the world.

Briefly, this philosophy holds that the industrialized world is run by profit-hungry, multi-national corporations, who are exploiting and oppressing people in developing regions with the encouragement of imperialist governments, at home and abroad.

Alternative routes to development are offered by Mao, Castro and/or Gandhi. The road to self-fulfillment is through policies of self-help and self-determination and the exclusion of outside polluting influences.

There is sufficient merit in this philosophy to make it appealing, especially to minority groups who have experienced cultural and economic discrimination. If, then, this argument has some attraction, why am I so worried about its implementation in the Canadian north?

Because it is light years ahead of where most Canadians are at. Because the majority of Canadians appear to be pretty conservative types. Because, when southern Canadians finally comprehend the political choices facing them in the North, there is likely to be an anti-native backlash, already evident in the North, which will scar race relations in Canada for generations.

That is what the confrontation in Good Hope was about.

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